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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The events of 11 September 2001 were not the first acts of global terrorism, but the effects were certainly felt by more nations than any previous terrorist act. The statements by President Bush in November 2001 made it clear that the United States will take any and all actions necessary to rid the world of terrorists with global reach. This war has in a sense become an unlimited war. The approach taken by the United States in response to the attacks has taken us down a road that may or may not reach the stated end state in the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism. An alternative approach, one that is more asymmetric in thought may have taken us to the end state in a timelier manner. However, without a properly defined end state it is difficult for Combatant Commanders to reverse plan. The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism is a sound document from which to start but some changes may be necessary. Additionally, without definitive measures of success it will be difficult to reach the end state. Since the first steps down the path to defeating terrorism have already been taken it is now time to ensure that the future actions are directed toward the root cause of the problem. Otherwise, the lifeblood of the terrorist movement, its recruiting base, will continue to flow.					
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WAR TERMINATION AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

16 May 2003

**No group or nation should mistake America's intentions: We will not rest until terrorist groups of global reach have been found, have been stopped, and have been defeated.<sup>1</sup>**

--- President Bush  
6 November 2001

The events of 11 September 2001 were not the first acts of global terrorism, but the effects were certainly felt by more nations than any previous terrorist act. People from ninety different countries died as a result of the attacks that day. This statement by the President was a loud and clear message to the world, the citizens of the United States, and especially to those terrorist groups that are determined to cause harm and create a state of unrest to the world's citizenry. It is also a statement that places the Global War on Terrorism in the unlimited war category. But is it really an unlimited war? There have been unlimited wars with limited objectives but it appears clear, from the statements the President has made, that this war will be one with an unlimited objective of ridding the world of the global terrorist threat. If this on-going war is to have an unlimited objective, how then are we to plan war termination? Without clearly defined measures of success, can the end state be achieved?

Historically, unlimited wars have ended with the unconditional surrender or annihilation of one of the adversaries. Per our own doctrine, "properly conceived termination criteria are key to ensuring that victories achieved with military forces endure."<sup>2</sup> Since the war on terrorism is a war of ideals and not one between nations with diverging policies, it is difficult to determine

termination criteria because there will be no negotiation of the peace. Unlike the Irish Republican Army and other terrorist groups with specific political objectives, such as independence, the terrorists of al-Qaida desire regime change in multiple countries, western influence and participation out of those regions, and an ideology shift in entire nations. Therefore, negotiations, if there are to be any, could not even take place without one party changing its ideology.

The operational commander's plan must be a clear and concise document that allows achievement of the strategic objective. Ideally, the operational commander uses the reverse planning process in development of the plan in order to meet the desired end state. Milan Vego believes, "The reverse planning process should always be applied; otherwise, the execution phase will be incoherent and without a well-thought-out road map toward the ultimate objective."<sup>3</sup> In many cases, this is not possible since events preclude the full development of a plan prior to action being necessary. The global war on terrorism is an example of such since actions in response to 11 September 2001 were undertaken long before an end state to the global war on terrorism was defined. However, in February 2003, the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (NSCT)* was published and the desired end state illustrated in Figure 3 of that document depicts an environment that has brought the scope of terrorism down to the "criminal domain," localized at the state level, without any networked organization or sponsorship.<sup>4</sup> Is this realistic, attainable, or measurable?

In what nation-state or states is it okay for this "criminal domain" to reside and conduct its criminal activities? The United States? The problem with such an end state is that it is somewhat ambiguous because it leaves many questions unanswered. Obviously, it is not acceptable to the citizens of the United States to have a terrorist organization operating out of our country, yet if that were the case it would be in concert with the end state defined in the aforementioned strategy. Furthermore, it is doubtful that any country wanting to operate within the global community would want the "criminal domain" of terrorism operating inside its borders. Is this end state properly defined and is it attainable? The answer to these questions is, in this writer's opinion, no and yes, respectively. However, as will be illustrated throughout this paper it will not be easy due to numerous factors, namely the actions we have already taken.

After 11 September 2001, the National War College formed a Student Task Force on Combating Terrorism. From September to May 2002 this task force worked together in studying terrorism and compiling a document recommending a strategy. *Combating Terrorism in a Globalized World* was first printed in December 2002. In February of 2003, the *NSCT* was published. The two documents have many similarities and it appears that the former was the genesis for the latter. The work done by the students of the National War College is excellent, and the subsequent documents that were borne from their labors are equally impressive. However, in order to apply the operational level of war to the war on terrorism one must

look at these documents critically to see if there are weaknesses in the strategy. Rectification of any points of contention for the Combatant Commanders tasked with melding the operational missions to the strategic goals and end state will be required in order to create the conditions necessary for the Combatant Commanders to accomplish their missions. This, undoubtedly, can be challenging due to the myriad of political concerns that may exist.

Ideally, the Combatant Commanders use the reverse planning process. As previously mentioned, the end state for the global war on terrorism did not exist prior to military action beginning; however, it may be useful to examine the given end state and determine its appropriateness. The desire to bring terrorism back to the "criminal domain" at the state level is the published end state. One could argue that the very end state that we now seek was extant prior to, and after, the events of 11 September 2001. It was only after our own actions in Afghanistan that the end state conditions have become more elusive.

By striking Afghanistan first and defeating the Taliban government that was friendly to al-Qaida and other terrorists, we have created conditions that will possibly foster more attacks and cause more delays in controlling terrorist acts throughout the world. What we did was somewhat analogous to striking a ball of mercury on your kitchen floor with a hammer. The little balls that result may not be found. Had we taken the time to build some kind of containment wall around the ball, prior to striking it, it would have been easier to find and clean up the mess.

The *NSCT* goes into detail describing the structure of terror. Figure 1 on page six of that document depicts a pyramid with five levels.<sup>5</sup> The top of the pyramid is the leadership with organization immediately below. The next two levels are states and the international environment. The last, and most important, level is the base of the pyramid, the underlying conditions. In an effort to rid the world of global reach by terrorists, this is the level where success is most critical. Just as an insurgency derives its strength by having a recruiting base from which to draw warriors, so too does a terrorist movement. Without a steady flow of recruits, the movement has a dubious future. Moreover, the bottom three levels of this pyramid are the areas that a Combatant Commander can have the most influence. His influence may not be direct, but it certainly exists indirectly through military-to-military and diplomatic relations with those states where these recruiting bases reside.

One of al-Qaida's goals is to create conditions in countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and the Philippines that will foster a change in government enabling the Islamic fundamentalists to rule. While we do not have good relations with all of the states targeted by al-Qaida, we certainly do with many of them, especially with the aforementioned ones. These are the nations most crucial to our enemy's success.

Our reactions to the events of 11 September 2001 are in concert with the strategy depicted in the *NSCT*. This is the case because the strategy focuses first on defeating the leadership and

destroying the safe haven, or base of operations. Our actions in Afghanistan were an attempt to accomplish these two objectives. However, if we look at the long-range goal of eliminating the global threat and reducing it to a state threat then it is fair to ask if our actions were necessary at the time. While there would have been some risk involved in leaving the Taliban regime in power and the safe haven of Afghanistan in place, it appears that by doing so we would have been in a better position to affect the future of global terror.

Prior to 11 September 2001, we believed that al-Qaida's headquarters and primary training bases were resident in Afghanistan. While there were other states (Iraq, Sudan, and Yemen) that were mentioned, Afghanistan and the Taliban appeared to be the center of gravity for the al-Qaida movement. By eliminating this safe haven and training base we accomplished two things. First, we disrupted the ability of the terrorists to congregate in one place for final preparations for their operation. This was a benefit. However, we also created more splintering of an organization that had more splinter groups than we initially realized. Thus, we have created a greater burden on our limited intelligence assets to find these cells or splinter groups. Additionally, we have now created conditions that call for greater centralization of control. Furthermore, by striking in Afghanistan we may have prolonged the effort. This plays into the hands of the terrorists. Not unlike an insurgency that retains its recruiting base, the longer it takes to defeat the terrorists the more likely it is for them to achieve



some, if not all, of their objectives. Sun Tzu said, "For there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited."<sup>6</sup>

This statement would normally apply somewhat equally to two warring states but in the case of a war between a state and non-state actor, it only applies to the state. In the case of the war on terrorism, it is much more applicable to the United States. Our national will fluctuates and it is already evident in this war. The focus is already more on domestic issues and less on the war against terror. The longer it takes to bring this war to an acceptable end the greater the odds that we will run out of resources to combat it. The longer it takes to bring this war to an acceptable end the greater the odds that we will run out of resources to combat it.

There are four tenets in the current strategy: defeat terrorists and their organizations; deny sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists; diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit; and defend United States citizens and interests at home and abroad.<sup>7</sup>

In late October 2001, we committed combat forces to the war on terrorism by striking the Taliban government and the safe haven of al-Qaida. As previously mentioned this effort aimed primarily at the first tenet and the top tier of the pyramid of terror, leadership. It also eliminated a government that sponsored, supported and provided sanctuary to terrorism. Once established in Afghanistan we began operations in the Philippines and the Horn of Africa to defeat terrorist groups and enable those countries to bolster their defenses against terrorists. Concurrently, we

exercised other instruments of power in an attempt to deny terrorists access to monies, cyberspace and other means they use to arm their forces and disseminate orders. All of this is in line with the strategy.

However, in our rush to seek retribution [for the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and Pennsylvania attacks] it is not clear that we had fully fleshed out the plan. This is understandable from the political standpoint since the American public is not a patient one; and, if there is an easily identifiable enemy, Americans expect their government to take action.

An alternative strategy might have been to leave this fight in the hands of the Combatant Commanders. Since all actions lead to defense of the homeland it may have been wise to establish the Combatant Commander, United States Northern Command position early on and make him the supported commander with all other Combatant Commanders in a supporting role.

This war on terrorism lends itself to the development of a campaign plan, the likes of which we have not seen since World War II. Northern Command would have been responsible for the development of the campaign plan and coordination/liaison of all other instruments of power. This would have established the centralized command and decentralized control structure under which the United States works so well.

The campaign plan would have started with the bottom of the pyramid of terror and worked up vice working from the top down as we are currently doing. If each region of the Unified Command Plan

were treated as a decisive point then each Combatant Commander would have been able to use the relationships he has developed in his region to chip away at the bottom three tiers of the pyramid. By using all instruments of power throughout his region of influence, each Combatant Commander could help to eliminate the recruiting base for the terrorist organizations, destroy terrorist cells, and support targeted nations. The major difference between this approach and the one we have already taken is that Afghanistan and the Taliban would not have been attacked until the time was right. By affording the terrorists that were totally devoted to the cause a safe haven toward which to flee, we would have been simultaneously eliminating the root causes for discontent in the other regions of the world and corralling the leadership and devotees in one specific state. Thus, once the decisive points had been defeated, the road would have clearly led to Afghanistan. At this point we could have committed whatever force was necessary to destroy the Taliban government and eliminate the leadership and devoted followers of the global terrorists. Even if we were not totally successful in killing or capturing all of them, we could have met the end state. There would have been nowhere for them to run other than the mountains of eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan. At this point, it would have been simply a matter of time until the movement would have withered away and died.

Clearly, there would have been risk involved. The majority of was political in nature. It may not have been politically palatable to leave the leadership in place with the possibility of future

attacks on the United States looming. However, the possibility of future attacks still exists today, even after the actions we have taken. Additionally, it may not have been acceptable, given America's impatience, not to do something tangible with the military instrument of power when we knew where the enemy's leadership was.

While this tack toward the problem may have taken time, it may have been more worthwhile in the end. It certainly would have met the end state given in the *NSCT* because it would have eliminated the ability of the leadership to fan out and recruit in other regions of the world. Stability of regions may have come sooner because the Combatant Commanders would be working hand-in-hand with friendly nations of their regions to establish the conditions necessary to dissolve discontent, thus the recruiting base grows smaller and smaller until it disappears or becomes so minuscule that it is not a factor.

This alternative strategy would have certainly been contentious since it leaves the leadership in place, initially. If a target of opportunity presented itself, then a cost-benefit analysis would have been required to determine if we wanted to strike the target at that time. By leaving the leadership in place and gaining ground in the other regions where the splinter groups reside we may have been able to gather more intelligence on our enemy. By hitting the leadership first, they go deeper into hiding and it becomes more difficult to track their movements and intentions. For instance, Paul Pillar in discussing U.S. actions against bin Laden in August 1998 observed:

Bin Ladin has taken one good shot from the U.S. military, and both he and his organization survived- even though his anticipated presence at one of the targeted facilities was a key consideration in the timing of the strike. Now he is at least as hard to hit (or to capture) as he was before. His movements not only make it difficult to track him; it also means that by the time more missiles are ordered into action and arrive on target, he is likely- as in August 1998- to have already moved on.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Pillar continues, "And of course, if he were to attack the United States again, he could heighten his own security even more in the days and weeks that followed."<sup>9</sup> Pillar continues this discussion by suggesting that a case could be made, not strongly, that military retaliation serves to deter bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Obviously, the attacks by the U.S. in 1998 did not serve to deter them for long as was evidenced by the events of 11 September 2001.

In order to facilitate the development of measures of success by the Combatant Commanders and increase our odds of winning this current conflict, the end state needs more clarification. One problem with the use of "criminal domain" is that it is not specific enough. The Mafia of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was certainly in the criminal domain, but its influence affected many facets of our lives and the economy. This level of presence in regard to terrorists is not acceptable. Furthermore, while there are many advantages to prosecuting and imprisoning terrorists there are also, as Mr. Pillar suggests, many limitations.

The limitations to the criminal justice instrument are at least as numerous as the advantages. To begin with, the deterrent effect is variable and uncertain. Fear of imprisonment no doubt causes some terrorists to hesitate (although it would be hard to point to any evidence of this effect, even using classified intelligence), but for others, accomplishment of their glorious (for them) deed may be more important than the prospect of anyone getting caught.

Deterrence through prosecution is obviously irrelevant to suicide bombers, and it may be as well to other low-level people with a comparable degree of desperation. The leaders, who are less likely to be caught, may not care much if the underlings are.<sup>10</sup>

This passage illustrates some of the difficulties with the criminal justice instrument as a deterrent. Additionally, it shows that by defining our end state as the scoping down of terrorism to the "criminal domain" we may not be clarifying what the strategic goal really is. This makes it more difficult to develop tangible measures of success. Mr. Biddle offers an end state that, in my opinion, clearly defines a measurable goal:

Our desired end state is the isolation of a remnant of al Qaeda into a small band of harried individuals living in deep cover as fugitives from the law, cut off from any base of popular support, despairing of any real hope of establishing their views through political power, and with no successor organization waiting in the wings to take up their struggle on behalf of a sympathetic people.<sup>11</sup>

An end state in these words allows operational commanders the opportunity to develop clearly defined measures of success to meet the goal. They can then modify and execute their Theater Engagement Plans to meet the desired end state.

The war on terrorism will not be easily won. Terrorism is an asymmetric means of warfare that is best countered by asymmetric or unconventional means. The alternative approach offered in this paper was an attempt to show that there were other ways of meeting the strategic goal as defined in the NSCT. Since we have already embarked upon the road to defeating terrorism, that alternative is not applicable. However, some of the tenets of an asymmetric approach, such as the one offered, may be applicable. The published

strategy is a good one and could be improved upon by either clarifying the end state desired or by delineating specific measures of success. While this may be difficult, it is necessary if we expect the Combatant Commanders to exploit the opportunities present in their regions. "The true battle is over the hearts and minds of the people whom the terrorists are trying to influence."<sup>12</sup>

A war of ideology should be approached with caution. Learning the grievances of the recruiting base and addressing them is a much quicker end than applying force whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself. The use of force can do more harm than good if not carefully managed.

Establishment of clear measures of success will aid in reaching the desired end state. Currently, it is unclear that those measures exist. Furthermore, how does one define them? Is it simply a time factor? If there is no terrorist attack on U.S. personnel or property within two years then are we achieving our goal? Does the capture of Taliban and al Qaida operatives indicate success? Certainly, these are helpful in the short term and perhaps in the long term, depending on whether or not any useful intelligence can be gained from them but how does it affect the true goal of changing the mindset of thousands of individuals. Some other measures of success that may be helpful are: (1) Are the grievances realistic and, if so, are they being addressed? (2) Are the number of attacks and severity of attacks diminishing? (3) Are the people more forthcoming with information regarding terrorist cells and participants? (4) Is the trust and confidence in the local

government, military and police forces on the rise? If the answers to these questions are yes then it is likely that the recruiting base for the terrorists will diminish and thus, the crucial base of the pyramid will begin to crumble. Without the base, the rest of the pyramid will soon fall. Without the will of the people to continue the fight then the movement will soon come to a halt. By focusing on the leadership and organization we certainly slow the movement down but do not ensure success. If the recruiting base is still viable then it is only a matter of time until new organization and leadership emerges.

We, along with those nations that are targeted by al-Qaida, should focus the majority of our energy on listening to what the people are saying and determining what actions are necessary to address them. Just as one would approach counter-insurgency we should also approach the war on terrorism. The insurgencies that have been successful in the past were those that mirrored their message with the priorities of the people. Likewise, the successful counter-insurgencies have been those that make changes that address many of the grievances of the target population. In order to achieve victory in the war on terrorism we must determine the reasons for such widespread discontent among the recruiting base al-Qaida exploits. By focusing on these issues we can then begin to affect the root causes of global terrorism. If we continue addressing the problem with violence and forceful change of governments then we risk exacerbating the problem and prolonging the war. Furthermore, if the changes made through violence are not



successful then we lose credibility and the terrorist movement may gain momentum. What course of action do we then undertake? If, for example, the Taliban and al-Qaida were to reestablish a foothold in Afghanistan then how would we respond? Obviously, we could deal another blow militarily but would it be of any use? It most certainly would cause death and destruction but would it positively affect the root causes?

As the strategy points out, our focus and bulk of effort must go toward helping our friends and allies disseminate a positive message not only verbally but also by our actions. When this is achieved we can then attain the desired end state; and, as our President so eloquently put it, "the United States and its friends and allies will secure a world in which our children can live free from fear and where the threat of terrorist attacks does not define our daily lives."<sup>13</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> White House, National Strategy For Combating Terrorism (NSCT), (Washington, DC: February 2003), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations, Joint Pub 3-0 (Washington, DC: 10 September 2001), I-10.

<sup>3</sup> Milan N. Vego, Operational Warfare (Newport: Naval War College publication 1004), 421.

<sup>4</sup> NSCT, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>6</sup> Sun Tzu, The Art of War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 73.

<sup>7</sup> NSCT, 15-28. Taken from the four goal statements that are further discussed in these pages.

<sup>8</sup> Paul R. Pillar, Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 103.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Biddle, "War Aims and War Termination," in Defeating Terrorism: Strategic Issue Analyses, (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, January 2002; reprint, Newport, RI: Naval War College Publication 3030, 2003), 12.

<sup>12</sup> National War College Student Task Force on Combating Terrorism, Report on Combating Terrorism in a Globalized World (National Defense University: 2002), 33.

<sup>13</sup> NSCT, 12.

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